Social Science Theories of Change

Stages of Change

The stage model of change emerged from theories in psychotherapy and behavioral change as formulated by Prochaska (1984). It is based on empirical research, first with smokers, and then a broad range of health and mental health behaviors. It can be, and has been, applied to many types of individual behaviors. The core constructs include: (1) change stages--change unfolds through a series of distinct stages or steps (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, termination); (2) change processes-- individuals engage in a variety of activities and experiences when attempting to change; (3) decisional balance--individuals weigh the pros and cons of changing; (4) self-efficacy--individual change is influenced by confidence and temptation.

Individual behavioral change is complex. It is a process that unfolds over time through a sequence of stages. Change, however, is not necessarily linear--relapse is possible at any point.

For more information about the stages of change model, see the following:

- http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/transtheoretical.htm
- Prochaska, J., DiClemente, C., & Norcross, J. (1992). In search of how people change. *American Psychologist*, 47, 1102-1114.
- Prochaska, J., Velicer, W., DiClemente, C., & Fava, J. (1988). Measuring processes of change: Applications to the cessation of smoking. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 520-528.
- Prochaska, J., et al. (1994). Stages of change and decisional balance for twelve problem behaviors. *Health Psychology*, 13, 39-46.

Diffusion Theory

Diffusion theory holds that change occurs when new ideas are invented, diffused, and adopted or rejected, leading to certain consequences. It has been widely applied in agriculture, public health, nutrition, and family planning programs. Diffusion is a process whereby an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. Thus, the key concepts include: (1) innovation: an idea, practice, or objective that is perceived as new; (2) communication channels: any of various means by which messages get from one person to another; (3) over time: relates to the adoption process that consists of five steps--knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation; (4) among members of a social system.

Initially diffusion was viewed as a one-way process by which messages are transferred from source to receiver. Further conceptualization depicts diffusion as a shared process where participants create and share information; the emphasis is on information exchange among participants (networks of individuals and/or groups) as part of a communication process as the stimulant of change.

For more information about diffusion theory, see the following:

- Rogers, Everett M. Diffusion of innovations (3d ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Oldenburg, B., Hardcastle, D., & Oko, G. (1997). Diffusion of innovations. In K. Glantz, F. Lewis, & B. Rimes (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research and practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ecological Systems

The ecological systems model of change has evolved from sociology, psychology, economics, and public health. Ecology refers to the interrelationships between organisms and their environment. This model explicitly emphasizes the role of the physical and external environment in behavioral change. People are part of a system. It posits that behaviors are influenced by intrapersonal, social, cultural, and physical environmental variables that are likely to interact and that may exist at various levels. Ecological theory has a number of core concepts: (1) behavior is influenced by multiple aspects of the physical and social environment as well as one's personal attributes; (2) environments are complex and must be understood if change is to be affected; (3) participants can be described at various levels of aggregation: individuals, families, organizations, communities, populations; (4) everything is interconnected, e.g., people influence their environments which in turn affect them; (5) systemic influences are not only multidimensional but also cumulative and interactive.

For more information about diffusion theory, see the following:

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sallis, J., & Owen, N. (1997). Ecological models. In K. Glantz, F. Lewis, & B. Rimes (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research and practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Empowerment

Empowerment is a process by which people gain control and mastery over their own lives and are able to influence others that affect their lives. It is based on the famous quote: "Give someone a fish and you feed her for a day; teach her to fish, and she will feed herself for the rest of her life." It emphasizes improvement and self-determination that has roots in community psychology, citizen participation, and action anthropology. Programs built using the empowerment model assume: (1) problems are best addressed by the people who are experiencing them; (2) people possess valuable knowledge about their own needs, values, and goals; (3) people possess strengths that should be recognized and built upon; (4) processes can be implemented that develop independent problem solvers and decision makers.

Empowerment is often applied to individuals. It can also be applied to programs, organizations, communities, societies, cultures.

For more information about empowerment, see the following:

- Fetterman, D., Kaftarian, S., & Wandersman, A. (Eds.). (1996). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Social Marketing

Social marketing is not a theory of change--of how change occurs. It is a process of applying efforts to increase the acceptability of a social idea or practice. It adapts commercial marketing and advertising techniques to programs in the effort to influence voluntary behavioral change of a target population. Introduced in the early 1970s, it uses the concepts of setting measurable objectives; doing consumer and market research; segmenting the market; product concept development and testing; directed communication-advertising; creating awareness; facilitation; incentives and exchange theory to maximize the target population's response. Key concepts of social marketing include: (1) a social idea or practice is introduced in manner that is compatible with target group; (2) awareness of the idea or practice is raised usually through mass media channels; (3) price of the product is fixed to fulfill the marketing campaign objective; (4) opportunity costs of the change go beyond monetary cost alone and must be included.

Steps in the social marketing process include: analyze the social environment research and select the target audience(s); design the social marketing strategy; plan the social marketing program mix; implement the effort; evaluate the social marketing effort.

For more information about social marketing, see the following:

- Kotler, P., & Roberto, E. (1989). *Social marketing. Strategies for changing public behavior.* New York: The Free Press (Macmillan, Inc.).
- Manoff, R. (1985). *Social marketing. New imperative for public health.* New York: Praeger.

Additional Information on theories of change can be found at:

- The Aspen Institute: http://www.aspeninstitute.org/